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ABSTRACT

This cross-cultural study investigates differences in self concept development in the United States and Denmark. The research is based on known societal and educational differences between Danish and American societies. These differences, from which hypotheses were drawn, involve (1) greater assignment of responsibility at early ages to Danish children than to American children, (2) greater commitment to the welfare state in Denmark leading to less pressure for success in the schools, and (3) superior progress in Danish society toward sexual equality. It was postulated that these differences would be reflected in predicted differences of self concepts. Subjects were 98 Danish and 190 American fifth and sixth graders from suburban elementary schools. Self concept was assessed with a 28-item measure based on the "like me-unlike me" dimension. Results were inconclusive, but did suggest areas for further research. (DP)

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Self Concept: A Cross Cultural Study[1]

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The recent attention given to "affective" education and development of the "whole child" has given new impetus to research into self concept. This research is becoming increasingly important in light of the consistent findings regarding the positive relationship of self concept and academic achievement (Brookover, et al. 1967; Campbell, 1967; Bledsoe, 1967; Williams and Cole, 1968; Landis, 1970; Purkey, 1970). While the precise nature of the relationship is not known, some degree of relationship is apparent. We have reason to assume, Purkey suggests, "... that enhancing the self concept is a vital influence in improving academic performance" (1970, p.27). The relationship is less clear for females than males, but Baum et al. (1969) found that females had higher reported self concepts than males.

Though it is becoming well accepted that academic achievement is a correlate of self concept, much research is needed in examining the development of one's self concept. From a phenomenological viewpoint Coopersmith (1967) suggests that the individual's frame of reference must be studied.

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> It is from a person's actions and relative position within (his) frame of reference that he comes to believe he is a success or failure --- Since all capabilities and performances are viewed from such a personal context we must know for example, conditions and standards within a given classroom, groups of professionals, or a family before making any conclusions about any individual's feelings of worthiness.

Coopersmith's remarks can be expanded to encompass the need for examining conditions and standards of particular cultures that may be associated with differences in self concept.

The purpose of this study was to examine self concept differences across two cultures which have known societal and educational differences. Through observation and discussion of these observations with Danish and American educators certain differences between the two cultures seemed apparent:

> Observation 1: Children in Denmark are given extensive responsibility at an early age --- they are expected to take care of themselves without extensive adult supervision

Several examples support this conclusion. Virtually all Danish children ride bikes to school or use public transportation. During free periods in school, Danish children are largely without supervision, playing soccer, tag, cards or reading. Many children go immediately to after-school centers where they work and play until working parents return home. In effect, a much greater percentage of a Danish child's day is self-regulated.

> Prediction 1a: Danish Ss will report greater Control of Environment self concept scores than American Ss.

> Prediction 1b: Danish Ss will report greater Self Confidence in Personal Attributes self concept scores than American Ss.

> Observation 2: Danish society is more extensively committed to the welfare state. There is less pressure to "make it" in Denmark; and correspondingly less pressure in elementary school grades.

Although not as extensive as Sweden's Welfare state, Denmark has an extensive welfare system. Hospitalization is virtually free; homes for the aged are available particularly for invalids. Education beyond the tenth grade is extensively tracked with only 15-20 percent of an age group going on to higher education. All education is state funded. Interestingly, at some time, almost 30 percent of an age group will attend a folk high school where no degrees, no credits, and no certification are awarded. A student in a folk high school is "learning for learning's sake." In effect the society is less pressurized than America's, and somewhat less competitive (Weinland, 1973).

Prediction 2: American Ss will report greater Achieving in School self concept scores than Danish Ss.

Observation 3: Danish society and education have made greater strides toward sexual equality.

There again, all things are relative but many Danish institutions reflect a greater opportunity for women to take part in the full range of society's activities. Day care centers and after school centers are available for working mothers. Putting one's child in such centers is far more acceptable. A teacher can more easily obtain part-time work; one is paid by the teaching "hour load". Women's liberation is very live in Denmark and Danish women have not achieved full equality of opportunity; but sexual equality is closer to realization in Denmark than America.

Prediction 3: Sex differences within countries will be greater for American than Danish Ss.

It was postulated that such societal and educational differences would be reflected in the predicted differences in the self concepts of

Danish and American children. If differences were apparent in this exploratory study it would seem important for future research to investigate possible causes. Such differences could have important implications for program development in American schools to promote growth in self concept.

Methods and Procedures

Instrumentation. A 28 item (like me, unlike me) self concept measure was employed. The original self concept dimensions measured by these items were generated through factor analysis by the Bureau of Educational Quality Assessment for the Pennsylvania Student Questionnaire in the seventh grade (Landis, 1972). Of the items selected from the instrument described by Landis for use in the study, 20 represented original Coppersmith Self Esteem Inventory items which generated scores on two dimensions: Self Confidence in Personal Attributes ("I'm pretty sure of myself; I can make up my mind without too much trouble") and Achieving in School ("I'm proud of my school work; I'm doing the best work I can"). The remaining eight items were reported by Landis (1972) to measure Control of Environment ("If I work hard, I can be what I want to be; If I stick to something long enough, I can make it work"). The 28 items were translated into Danish by Professor Ole Varming and colleagues of the Jonstrup Statsseminarium for use in the Danish schools. A copy of this revised self esteem measure appears in Appendix A.

Sample. The sample consisted of 98 Danish and 190 American Ss from the fifth and sixth grades of several suburban schools. American Ss were drawn from suburbs and towns in central Connecticut. While no race data was kept, the schools were largely white, and middle to upper-middle class.

Danish students were drawn exclusively from several schools in Lyngby a suburb of Copenhagen. Housing patterns in Lyngby include a mixture of private homes and apartments. Most students would be classified as middle class --- a far more encompassing category in Denmark. If one can judge by dress, home and school appearance and teacher evaluation, the socio-economic level of the two groups was similar.

Analysis. Two way analyses of variance were employed. In each analysis the dependent variable was one of the three self concept dimension scores and the total score; the independent variables were country (Denmark - America) and grade (5,6); country and sex.

Results. Since no grade level differences or interactions between grade levels and self concept scores were found, data were collapsed over grade levels. Thus, the analyses to be reported employed the country by sex two way analyses of variances for the self concept scores.

Table 1 cotains the means and standard deviations and analysis of

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Insert Table 1

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variance for Control of Environment. Inspection of the table entries indicates that, as expected (Prediction 1a), Danish Ss (especially males) tended to score slightly higher than the American Ss, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations and analysis of variance for the Self Confidence in Personal Attributes scale. The expected difference between countries (Prediction 1b) was not found, but an interaction was manifest between sex and country with respect to the Ss' self

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Insert Table 2
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confidence in their personal attributes. Figure 1 illustrates that Danish males and American females reported a higher self confidence.

Insert Figure 1

While this is consistent with research reported on American females (Baum et al., 1969), the significantly higher ($t = 3.2$, d.f. = 96, $p < .01$; Kirk, 1968) Self Confidence in Personal Attributes score of the Danish males, when compared to Danish females, was contrary to expectation (Prediction 3).

Table 3 contains the means, standard deviations and analysis of

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Insert Table 3
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variance for Achieving in School. Consistent with Prediction 2, American Ss scored significantly higher on the Achieving in School score.

Table 4 contains the means, standard deviations and analysis of

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Insert Table 4
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variance for the Total Self Concept score, which was generated by summing the scores on the three self concept scales previously reported. Inspection of the table entries indicates that an interaction was again manifest between sex and country with respect to Total Self Concept. Figure 2

Insert Figure 2
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illustrates that Danish males and American females reported high self concepts.

Separate sex comparisons for the Danish and American groups indicated that the within country differences depicted in Figure 2 were not statistically significant, but greater sex differences were again present for the Danish Ss.

Discussion. The results of this exploratory study provide interesting cross cultural information concerning the development of self concept. Since the study is exploratory in nature, more questions than answers are raised. It is obvious that much further research is needed before any firm answers can be forwarded for the findings in this study. Several areas seem appropriate for further study.

1. It seems worthwhile to examine further the trend (not significant) toward the Ss' greater perception of control over the environment in the Danish society. As suggested in an earlier study, a consideration of cultural backgrounds and associated family structures is clearly needed when considering the origin of the Control of Environment construct (Gable and Minton, 1971).

2. With respect to sex differences within countries, the trend for American females to report higher self concepts than American males (not significantly higher) was consistent with other reported studies. Although it was felt that the Danish society and education has made greater strides toward sexual equality, greater sex differences in favor of males were found for the Danish Ss. What cultural differences exist that may help explain these differences?

Related to this question is the area of self concept and societal expectation. In this respect, the relative sexual inequality in America may contribute to enhanced female self concept. Compared with males, a

girl's place in American society is more clearly marked out; society's expectations are much more clearly stated. As greater equality of opportunity is achieved between the sexes as in Denmark, the result may be to increase female role anxiety since occupational sex roles are less clear. The evidence in this study is not conclusive on this point, but in an age of renewed effort by women to achieve full equality it suggests an important area for research.

3. The emphasis on competition and the related need for success in American schools may have been reflected in the American Ss placing significantly greater emphasis on an achievement orientation in school.

Evidence is fragmentary but a final question emerges from these results. If American Ss' greater emphasis on achievement orientation is not reflected in Ss perception of their control of environment, then a fundamental dichotomy in American schools may be apparent. Surely if we seek to develop self concept in an academic setting without enhancing one's perception of his control over his broader environment, we may be creating an artificial person. The relationship between various elements of self concept must be explored far more extensively before we embark on a self concept enhancement program.

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Scoring Key

C = Control of Environment
S = Self Confidence in Personal Attributes
A = Achieving in School
- = Reverse Score

Appendix A

(Circle One)

Boy Girl Grade____

Please mark each sentence in the following way:

If the sentence tells how you usually feel, put a check (X) in the column "This Is Like Me."

If the sentence does not describe how you usually feel, put a check (XX) in the column "This Is Unlike Me."

There are no right or wrong answers.

			This Is Like Me	This Is Unlike Me
S	1.	I'm pretty sure of myself.....	( )	( )
C-	2.	Every time I plan to do something (make a plan) something goes wrong.....	( )	( )
A-	3.	I spend a lot of time daydreaming.....	( )	( )
S-	4.	I often wish I were someone else.....	( )	( )
C-	5.	Luck decides most things that happen to me.....	( )	( )
A-	6.	I find it very hard to talk in front of the class..	( )	( )
C	7.	If I work hard, I can be what I want to be.....	( )	( )
S-	8.	There are lots of things about myself I'd change if I could.....	( )	( )
A	9.	I'm proud of my school work.....	( )	( )
S	10.	I can make up my mind without too much trouble.....	( )	( )
C	11.	If I stick to something long enough, I can make it work.....	( )	( )
A	12.	I'm doing the best work I can.....	( )	( )
S-	13.	It takes me a long time to get used to anything new	( )	( )
A	14.	I like to be called on in class.....	( )	( )
C	15.	If I work hard, I can get a good job.....	( )	( )
S-	16.	I'm often very sorry for the things I do.....	( )	( )
C-	17.	There isn't much of a chance for a person like me to succeed in life.....	( )	( )
A-	18.	I wish I could do much better in school.....	( )	( )
S	19.	I can usually take care of myself.....	( )	( )
C	20.	If I work hard, I'll be able to go to college.....	( )	( )
A-	21.	I often feel upset in school.....	( )	( )
S	22.	I'm pretty happy.....	( )	( )
S-	23.	Things are all mixed up in my life.....	( )	( )
A-	24.	I often get discouraged in school.....	( )	( )
S	25.	I can make up my mind and stick to it.....	( )	( )
C	26.	If I work at something long enough, I will succeed..	( )	( )
S-	27.	I often feel ashamed of myself.....	( )	( )
S	28.	If I have something to say, I usually say it.....	( )	( )

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and
Analysis of Variance for
Control of Environment

		Danish	American	Total
Males	N	48	78	126
	$\bar{X}$	6.6	6.3	6.4
	SD	1.3	1.6	1.5
Females	N	50	112	162
	$\bar{X}$	6.6	6.5	6.5
	SD	1.5	1.4	1.4
Total	N	98	190	288
	$\bar{X}$	6.6	6.4	6.5
	SD	1.4	1.5	1.4

Analysis of Variance
Source Table

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Country	1	1.5	1.5	.7
Sex	1	1.6	1.6	.8
Sex by Country	1	1.7	1.7	.8
Error	284	576.3	2.0	

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations and
Analysis of Variance for
Self Confidence in Personal Attributes

		Danish	American	Total
Males	N	48	78	126
	$\bar{X}$	9.0	8.0	8.4
	SD	2.0	2.3	2.2
Females	N	50	112	162
	$\bar{X}$	7.9	8.4	8.2
	SD	2.5	2.2	2.4
Total	N	98	190	288
	$\bar{X}$	8.3	8.3	8.3
	SD	2.4	2.3	2.3

Analysis of Variance
Source Table

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Country	1	.1	.1	0
Sex	1	19.4	19.4	3.8
Sex by Country	1	50.6	50.6	9.8 **
Error	284	1461.0	5.1	

** $p < .01$

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations and
Analysis of Variance for
Achieving in School

		Danish	American	Total
Males	N	48	78	126
	$\bar{X}$	4.2	4.7	4.5
	SD	1.4	1.9	1.7
Females	N	50	112	162
	$\bar{X}$	4.2	5.0	4.8
	SD	1.7	2.1	2.0
Total	N	98	190	288
	$\bar{X}$	4.2	4.9	4.7
	SD	1.5	2.0	1.9

Analysis of Variance
Source Table

Source	df	SS	MS	F	
Country	1	28.3	28.3	8.1	**
Sex	1	1.2	1.2	.3	
Sex by Country	1	1.3	1.3	.4	
Error	284	988.3	3.5		

** $p < .01$

Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations and
Analysis of Variance for
Total Self Concept

		Danish	American	Total
Males	N	48	78	126
	$\bar{X}$	19.8	19.1	19.4
	SD	3.1	4.8	4.2
Females	N	50	112	162
	$\bar{X}$	18.4	20.0	19.5
	SD	4.3	4.6	4.5
Total	N	98	190	288
	$\bar{X}$	19.1	19.6	19.4
	SD	3.8	4.7	4.4

Analysis of Variance
Source Table

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Country	1	14.2	14.2	.7
Sex	1	4.2	4.2	.2
Sex by Country	1	91.2	91.2	4.8 *
Error	284	5434.1	19.1	

* $p < .05$

Figure 1

Cell Means for Country by Sex Interaction on Self Confidence in Personal Attributes

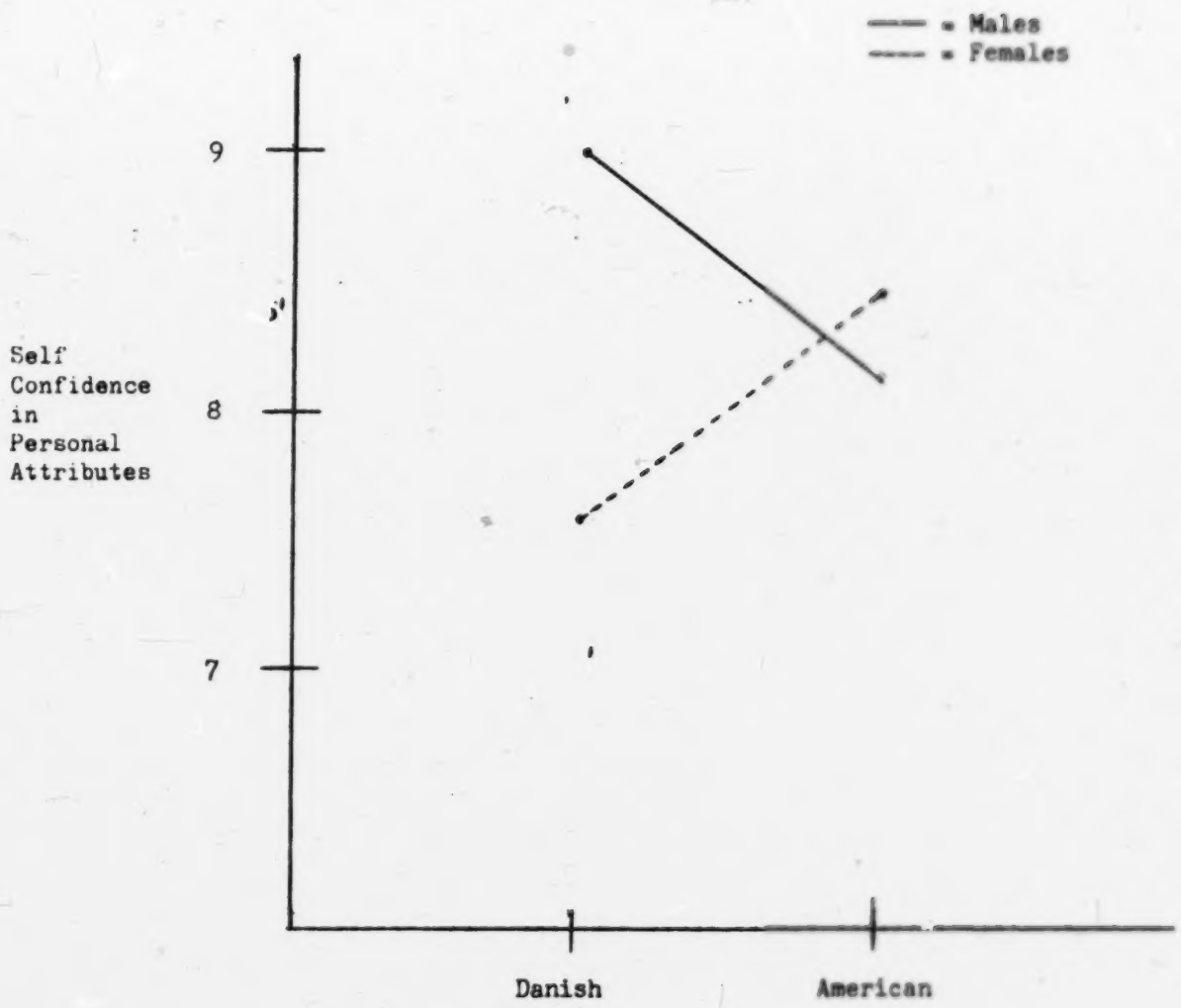

Figure 2

Cell Means for Country by Sex
Interaction on Total Self Concept